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Frances Lebsty Smith

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THE METHOD OF WORK CIRCLES IN THE TEACHING OF THE DEAF CHILDREN

by The Institute of Special Pedagogics,
Warsaw, Poland

It is not the first time that the Special Pedagogics takes a lead in the sphere of research for the new and right methods. So it is now.

In the face of the recent school reform there is a necessity, on the side of the Polish didactics, to reform also the way of teaching normal children.

Such reform of methods had of necessity appeared in the field of Special Pedagogics long ago. It had to change old traditional methods for the new, better adjustavle methods to the progress of the present day knowledge about a child.

It has been introduced into teaching in Polish educational system of Special Pedagogics for the last thirty years. It has especially been done in the school of the mentally handicapped and deaf children. It has been called " a method of work circles" and its aims and progress illustrate, more or less, the tasks put forth before the new reform of the normal school. The method of work circles calls for the dropping of the " passive consumption" method in the traditional school (prof. Okoń) and for giving the school the atmosphere of interest, creativeness and activity to both teacher and pupil.

The method of work circles was invented by Maria Grzegorzewska and it evolved, as most of the modern methods of teaching (among others the whole movement of Freinet's schools, what is distinctly stated by its creator) from the method of O. Decroly. The common

basis of these modern methods is the necessity of turning the attention of the school towards life. It finds its expression in a slogan that was formulated by Decroly: " a way to life leads through life itself". All kinds of modern schools make that slogan work their own way. The method of work circles, as the name itself suggests in its turning to life, puts a special stress on the activity and personal active participation in the process of knowledge.

The leading role of the teacher is strongly emphasised. The method of work circles is practised in the first four classes of the elementary school. Like Decroly's method, and others deriving from it, it doesn't (as it is often done in the traditional schools) devide school curriculum into separate subjects (sometimes correlated with each other) and separately dealt with by the pupil.

According to the psychophysical righteousness of knowledge this method depends on a global approach to the events, and presentation of them to the pupils in a way that should possibly be giving certain whole, and be based entirely on the pupils' own experience, thus making him very busy in the process of learning.

In the school work it may be attained by way of creating especially favourable conditions for pupil's active observation made of the most characteristic objects in the most characteristic circumstances (e.g. a cow in a cow-shed, vegetables in the field or on the market etc.). This presents usually the most important and fundamental part of the presented didactic unit of the so called work circle.

That unit always represents a fragment of a larger whole which, in turn, is a part of another still larger outline of the programme (e.g. the daily circle "coal" represents a fragment of a larger circle, for instance of a weekly circle "fuel" - the latter is a fragment of still another circle of a monthly circle which is "preparation to winter" etc.).

The next task of a teacher, usually done in the classroom as the second part of his classes, is, along the creation of good conditions for the personal observation work by pupils, to supply them with the material for making comparisons between the objects that have already been seen with the new ones of the same type. Its aim is the enlargement of their knowledge in different but subjectively related situations. For instance, children having seen already a cow in a stable are shown cardboard pictures of

different types of cows in the classroom by the teacher. That is the second stage of work as far as teacher is concerned. Thus the children get the related characteristics of the objects. Sometimes it is good to give a reading passage on the related objects - the children put everything down in their exercise-books which become then kind of diaries, and present syntheses of what they had learned on that particular day.

This is a part of a lesson, usually the latter one, that is destined for the developing of the skill of the abstractive faculty and of classification and therefrom of creation of ideas, etc.

It is however possible to differentiate this part of the lesson from the first one only theoretically because in the course of active observation of phenomenons by the children the teacher must introduce moments for abstraction and generalisation, all the time.

The third part is to be occupied by the application of the acquired knowledge (by the pupils) to the various forms of the pupil's activity (artistic and technical or practical). Moreover it gives at the same time a control of whether the daily business was understood by the pupils. That part of the lesson is by all means best for getting in all the given knowledge.

"Such schools techniques as reading, writing, arithmetics should be given by degrees of necessity to help to solve a given problem, according to the logic of the acquired knowledge and to programme needs, child's possibilities - its level of efficiency.

1/ Maria Grzegorzewska: An analisis of revalidating possibilities of work circles method, repr. from "Szkola specjalna" v.XVIII Nr I 1957 Vide also Syntetic Tables by the same author entitled: "The Picture of the Work Circles Method" from the point of view of its value of efficiency (Szkola Specjalna XX Nr 1/2) as well as numerous other articles in the same periodical.

An example of such lesson will show clear values of the lesson conducted according to work circles method.

Following is the outline of a lesson in class III at a special school for the deaf conducted according to this method.

A larger circle is worked upon: autumn crops and within it is a narrower circle: vegetables. The crops belong to the children (the distance is half kilometer from the school, the number of children - 10). September. In the first week of their school work the

children themselves suggest the need of having a look at the results of their spring work on the school plot. Some of them had already been there before and brought various news about it. So, all of them are greatly interested in going to the garden to see what is going on there. The teacher prepares the trip by showing them tables of pictures illustrating children's work on their beds. The pictures are hanging on the wall. The children are looking at the wall pictures and try to remember their own work. They answer the following questions: how many beds they had, what was planted or sawn on them, whom they asked to take care of their beds in summer time.

On the table in the classroom there are lying pictures of the vegetables with the captions underneath. The children, in turn, come up to the table and each of them reads what is written on the picture (showing it to the others). Then he comes up to the blackboard and writes on it the name of the vegetable (pointed at by the teacher) which is growing on the beds.

The summary of these answers are put on the blackboard by the teacher: "We have beds. There are growing: carrots, beetroots, dill, parsley, potatoes and several onions. In summer time the bed was looked after by Mrs. Caretaker". The children put all this down in their exercise-books and then they draw vegetables with their crayons (arithmetic moments).

Now the children plan what it is necessary to take to the plot. All of them, in turn, say what will be helpful and for what purpose: a basket for the crops; some will say: a water-can, a hoe, a spade and a rake. The teacher writes all this on the blackboard. Now there is a talk between the teacher and the pupils about the tools, their use and whether they will be needed by them. Finally the children make up their mind to carry all of the tools and if needed use them (some arithmetic problems arise thereat).

On their way to the garden the children imagine various possibilities as to the changes they will find out there. They remind one another of certain things that had taken place during their work there in the spring. One of them suggest cooking soup at school with the vegetables from the garden. That is taken up with great enthusiasm. The teacher, on the other hand, expresses the possibility of inviting someone else to eat the soup. The children give various

suggestions, they want to ask class number Ia, or the teacher from the other class, or the headmaster. Finally, in consequence of their talk, they decide to ask Mrs. Caretaker as they want to give her their thanks for taking care of their plot during the summer time that is from the watering, weeding and thinning out the too densely growing seedlings.

The plot belonging to class II can be already seen in the distance. The children start running merrily, ejaculations of various pitch can be heard, happiness and enthusiasm dominate. The plot has been kept well and tidy - the rows of plants are rich and beautiful, it differs in that from the neighbouring beds which have been kept badly. The teacher takes advantage of that and gives them a number of puzzles to solve in connection with the necessity of having sunshine, humidity and space for the growth and development of plants.

The children try the thickness of roots of the carrots and parsleys, the growth of bulbs of potatoes. They compare them with one another, they recognise these vegetables by their leaves, the look of roots, by their taste and smell (all the children take very active share in these exercise of senses and cropping up arithmetical moments). They plan which and how many vegetables to take for soup (there arise also some arithmetical problems). They pull out some carrots, parsley, onions, dig up some potatoes and cut some dill. The rest of the vegetables they will leave for some more weeks to grow on the beds. They put the vegetables into several baskets, and carry them to school, in turns, later to cook them in the soup for the next day.

Already in the classroom they take out the vegetables and put them on the table and those of them who are least clever once more segregate them, identifying and finding out their names. Afterwards all of them with their teacher's help make the plan of how to cook the soup. As only a few children have any idea of how to cook a soup the teacher tells all the children to enquire at home or in the school kitchen how to cook it. At the same time he tells them to bring some necessary things to season it. Some butter and salt are necessary. To end the lesson they work out a text of invitation that they intend to send to their guest. Each child speaks out his own invitation. The teacher corrects and helps them. Finally they choose out one they think the best. The child which can write best,

writes that text on the blackboard - all children write it on slips of paper and the one that is best written they will send to Mrs. Caretaker. (Class II thanks Mrs. Caretaker for her care over the beds and asks her to soup tomorrow.)

We can see that the teacher working by the work circles method combines didactic ways with the other pedagogic and therapeutic principles. He creates suitable conditions required for physical exercise, for happiness and full happiness into the bargain, i.e. happiness and satisfaction resulting from an interesting and creative work. Its fruits were clearly seen. They create a sense of one's own efficiency and usefulness. The teacher here is, first of all, thinking of how best to organize children's collective work (moreover he spurns them to develop their possibilities for organizing collective work by themselves). All the time his attention is fixed on everything in children's life which may deepen their knowledge and emotions. He directs them to develop the creative, clear and scholarly attitude towards the surrounding events and to making them share feelings and results of cooperation with others.

It is almost impossible to enumerate the various educational aspects and possibilities lying in front of the teacher who works with this method in his didactic work. All of them, as a whole, represent a basis on which he is building his way to introduce children into the world. This seems to be the essence of rational instruction. For one of the most important rules of this method is, that it is impossible to satisfy children's thirst for knowledge in isolation from the total number of their various needs.

The method of work circles approaches children's needs as a uniform psychological phenomenon. They must be taken into consideration as a whole without the omission of any essentials.

Thus globally presented matter will enable a teacher to put into practice the educational aims that are characteristic for the type of the school.

The method of work circles in realisation of its aims necessitated by the bio-physio-neuro-psychological laws of instruction are based on the following outline of developing mechanisms that form a natural way for instructive and emotional processes, thus aspired to:

(1) One's own instructive and emotional experience gradually developing new instructive and emotional contents that form together the permanent complexities that are shaped entirely individually (personal and emotional dynamic stereotypes).

(2) The processes of analisis, syntesis, deducting, judgement, valuation, directing tendencies that had not been imposed upon from the outside but always connected with a given experience as its inevitable consequences, its so to speak, fruits.

(3) Recreative and creative share (expressed by acceptation or negation) in the surrounding natural and social community.

This scheme gives a theoretical idea of the work circles methods, the idea of adaptation into life of a singular human being, thus being the most important problem of the school and the problem of school methods.

Now it is necessary to put a question how the work circles methods solve concrete tasks in face of thus presented problem.

It requires on the side of teachers to put following duties into practice (independently of the teaching material):

(1) Creating best conditions for good reception of impressions (i.e. for the natural and not spurned on by various ways, like commands or prohibitions), for concentration of attention, for fixing students interest on naturally developing or introduced by the teacher groups of impressions.

(2) Adaptation that is broadly understood, i.e. with the attitude of negation towards certain phenomenons, that is those which are usually contrary to the nature of pursuit of the given man. Such negation is considered to be an example of good adaptation.

(3) Creating conditions which would enable a student to receive his impressions of himself, without imposing them on him as the contents for memorisation. It must be what we colloquially call personal experience.

(4) Creating conditions which would enable a student the integration of group impressions with the already known.

(5) Creating conditions in which the impressions would be received under the influence of good motives (interest, gaiety, sympathy, sense of security, understanding and certainty that the duties and responsibility will be adapted to one's possibilities etc).

(6) Creating such conditions which would enable a student to find out in them his own proper way of development and also how to enrich it and shape.

(7) Creating conditions in which a student would attain satisfaction as a result of his individual and collective endeavours.

(8) Creating conditions in which a student would be able to develop his liking for individual work that is understood as part of collective work. Such conditions should give him good taste for development of personal responsibility.

It is difficult to enumerate here all duties that lie in front of the teacher who conducts his classes by the method of work circles. Neither is it possible to give here any concrete and so numerous examples of realizations of the above rules.

It is quite obvious that in order to realise the above rules, so important for the work circles method, it is impossible to keep to the traditional form of school organization.

The children who are taught by the work circles method are instructed in the conditions that would enable them best to go on to the aim they set before themselves and to the subject of their work. It is usually in a stable, a cow-shed, a garden, at a post-office, at a shoemaker's, at a garage of the fire brigade etc. Sometimes they may work in the school to put the material they had gathered, in good order, to compare the results of various works etc.

Our children who are taught by the work circles method have no textbooks (Freinet's attitude is very much like ours, he says

that a manual with its traditional system of lessons presents the greatest harm done to the children by the teacher). Children are taught by the method of work circles and instead of manuals they have notebooks into which they put notes on encountered impressions. Whenever they wish to refresh their memory on something, they look into it, and it must be stated that the notebook becomes dear to the children. It is difficult for them to part with it.

As has been said before the material given to children at school in lower classes, is not given as in traditional school, systematically according to the degree of difficulties in the sphere of school techniques (reading, writing, arithmetics). They are not thought of as the main link "leading" the work on child's development.

The extent of child's education is done according to certain system within entirely different categories - not so strangely formalistic as it is now in the present day traditional teaching (that adjust the studied material to, for instance, the coincidence of letters in the primer).

Our frame of the system is the contents frame i.e. learn and feel. It engulfs larger and larger contents of studies parallelly to a child's development, because one of the most important rules of the work circles method is that the children must know that everything they do is justified and that whatever they do lies on the way of their further development. We are against all the activities whose significance is not clear to them (reading for the sake of reading, writing for writing, etc.). The children have to read in order to learn something, to fix in memory, to preserve etc.

But to give a chance to the school techniques to come to a certain mechanical stage we give each class two hours a week in which the children learn how to write prettily, learn multiplication table etc. that is to the exercises which in the time of happy course of experimental learning, in one week, may be too few.

The children understand the significance of those exercises and realise that they will help them in putting down everything they learn by experience, i.e. their impressions, calculations and so on.

Such, therefore, is one of the main rules of the work circles method: to make reading, writing and arithmetics serve the purpose of practical education and thereby to help children to cope with the situations by themselves. On the contrary, the traditional school system had as its aim the subjection of the practical experience and phenomenons to the already known letters and their ways. In connection with the social value of this method let us quote Maria Grzegorzewska:

"This method requires team work, otherwise it will not be successful in acquiring various knowledge in the process of education, in collective syntheses, in collective interpretations of the given entities, in various presentations of a problem. Such work may make up and develop various social values. Everything is practically studied, acquired by experience, deduced by reasoning and always having in mind a care about the whole. It tells how to help to achieve the aim, to work well, honestly, accurately, otherwise everything will go wrong, for instance one thing will not work with another, there will not be found common measure, etc.

So then to advise, draw attention to, warn, assist, encourage, show, explain - all to the mutual and victorious overcoming of the difficulties. Everything by the sense of responsibility for the common cause. Gradually a child begins to understand how to satisfy its own needs in accord with the others, what is a collective and its share in it.

Always and everywhere this problem is a living thing and it is quite clear in all matters connected with a child's need and those of its collective. The method is taking shape in a certain way. Its program is taken according to the experience of the lower classes, from the natural surroundings (rich contents of the social life of the nearest community).

Those first contents that have been experienced and gradually studied introduce their young student into the way of social life and of social duties, and slowly shape in him awareness of his position and duties in relation to the community and teach him how to attain active position in life."(Maria Grzegorzewska)

Now we can see how this compact and logical whole represented by the method of work circles and its fruitful practical re-

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